

Facts About the West Bend Airport Expansion Site Wetlands

What's all the fuss?

1. The area of wetland to be directly filled or severely degraded is massive. The project proposes to directly fill 60.3 acres of wetlands and cut off the tops of the trees in 88 additional acres. This would represent the largest single-site wetland fill in Wisconsin since the passage of the Clean Water Act.

2. The wetlands provide important flood storage and water quality protection functions for the Milwaukee River. The project proposes an 84 acre increase in impervious surface, much of which is due to wetland fill. Polluted runoff flowing directly into the river is expected to increase, as is the potential for sediment delivery, particularly during construction. Delivery of oil, grease and other chemicals (e.g., de-icing compounds) from the runways and hangars into the river may also exacerbate water quality problems.

3. Many wetland types are to be destroyed. The project site encompasses a diverse wetland complex including sedge meadow, floodplain forest, wet meadow/shallow marsh, and a lacustrine forest wetland system (which includes a shrub-carr wetland, shallow marsh, sedge meadow, and a hardwood swamp with upland islands and ephemeral ponds).

4. Important wetland functions will be destroyed or severely degraded. The chart below quantifies the # of acres slated for direct fill that were characterized as medium, medium-high, or high quality for the wetland functions listed.

Summary of wetland functions for direct fill wetlands only*

	Floral	Habitat	Fishery	Shoreline	Flood & Storage	Water Quality	Aesthetics & Recreation	Ground water
Acres M	3.5	1.0	1.9	18.6	0.0	0.2	21.2	5.4
Acres M/H	14.9	12.4	0.0	0.0	25.3	8.0	0.0	0.0
Acres H	21.5	34.5	0.1	0.1	23.5	51.3	25.9	53.8
Total	39.9	47.9	2.0	18.7	48.8	59.5	47.1	59.2

*60.3 acres of wetlands are slated for direct-fill.

5. Fragmentation will further degrade wetland biodiversity and functions. The new runway and hangars, re-routed road, and the tree-cleared areas will all fill or clear portions of larger wetland complexes. This will disrupt hydrologic connections and linear environmental corridors and create conditions favorable for the colonization of invasive plants at the remaining wetlands.

6. If the project proceeds at this location, many more acres of wetlands will likely be filled in the future. Clearing trees from a wooded wetland will create open water areas attractive to waterfowl but hazardous to planes. It is not uncommon for secondary requests to fill wetlands for the purpose of reducing the risk of bird-strikes to be made after a project is completed. The expanded airport will likely also lead to additional development in adjacent wetlands (i.e., secondary impacts).

7. These Wetlands are recognized as priority areas for protection by federal, state and regional governments including designations as:

- a. *Advanced Identification (ADID)* wetlands. An Environmental Protection Agency process which identifies wetlands generally not suitable for fill. 51.2 acres of the proposed 60.3 acres of direct fill wetlands are ADID wetlands. 78 of the 88 wetland acres to be tree-cleared are ADID wetlands.
- b. *Area of Special Natural Resource Interest (ANSRI)*. ANSRIs are afforded special consideration under numerous Wisconsin environmental laws, including provisions recognizing that mitigation generally does not effectively compensate for functional loss of unique and significant (ANSRI) wetlands.
- c. *Primary Environmental Corridor*. A Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC) designation (based on strict criteria) which recommends an area for preservation in natural open space use as part of regional water quality management plans. This area also includes two SEWRPC identified natural areas and one “critical species habitat” area.
- d. *Class I, II, and III Wildlife Habitat Areas*. (SEWRPC & Wisconsin DNR).
- e. *Priority Area for the North American Waterfowl Management Plan*, a US Fish & Wildlife Service sponsored document which identifies habitat conservation needs in specific regions.

What next and how you can help?

- 1. Scoping input for the Environmental Impact Statement needed before November 13, 2006:**
See http://www.wiscwetlands.org/alerts/alert_20060928.htm for more details.
- 2. Talk to your friends, neighbors, elected officials, conservation colleagues and local media about this project.** Awareness of the ecological costs and questionable benefits of this project is still very limited. Many more voices are needed to turn the tide.
- 3. Help us identify technical advisors.** We continue to look for experts to advise on technical issues such as airport engineering standards, hydrological impacts, transportation traffic projections and economic development assumptions. If you know someone with expertise in these areas who may be sympathetic to our concerns please, help us meet them to discuss this project.
- 4. Get involved locally:** The local group Watershed Watchers is doing excellent grassroots organizing and education work in opposition to this project in the greater West Bend community. Consider attending their meetings and lending them your time and support.

For more information contact the Wisconsin Wetlands Association

Wisconsin Wetlands Association

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www.wiscwetlands.org